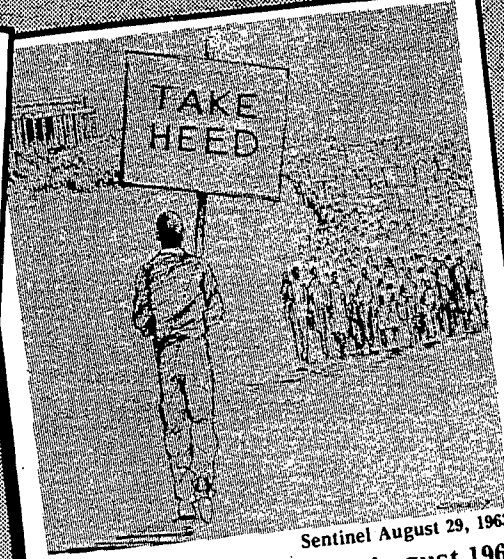




Sentinel July 7, 1960

Demonstrations in 1960 protesting segregation at Glen Echo amusement park provoked creation of the Human Relations Commission. The Sentinel's caption on this photo noted that some nearby residents made their own placards and joined the pickets, while others provided refreshments.



Sentinel August 29, 1963

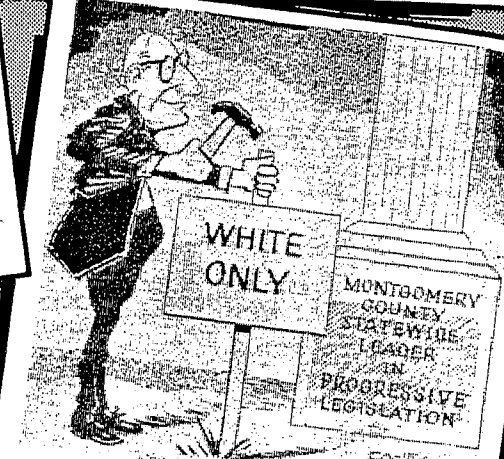
The Sentinel depicts the August 1963 March on Washington when 250,000 people heard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., announce his dream of equality.



The Montgomery Mall marquee on December 18, 1977, the date Montgomery County legislation became effective banning discrimination against handicapped persons.



Bertram Keys, Jr., the first full-time Executive Secretary of the Human Relations Commission. He held the office from 1967 to 1971, when Alan Dean took over.



Sentinel April 25, 1963

A Sentinel cartoon published the day after 1,200 people attended a County Council hearing on a proposal to repeal Montgomery County's 1962 Public Accommodations Law. The proposal was rejected.



Sentinel June 16, 1966

Outside the County Office Building in Rockville marchers support open housing, while inside the Human Relations Commission was holding its fourth hearing on proposed fair housing legislation. The legislation was enacted in 1967.

TWENTY YEARS *Of* CIVIL RIGHTS PROGRESS

A History of the
Human Relations Commission
of Montgomery County,
Maryland

By David Brack

The Montgomery County Human Relations Commission celebrates twenty years of progress in 1980. Created by the County Government as a "sounding board" for interracial discussion and release of tension in the early 1960's, the Commission has evolved into an established enforcement agency as well, investigating, holding hearings and adjudicating complaints of discrimination in public accommodations, housing and employment.

In step with rising public awareness of the various forms of discrimination, its mandate has gradually broadened over the years. To racial and religious issues have been added those of ancestry, national origin, sex, marital status, age, and physical and mental handicap. Not surprisingly, the Commission's annual complaint caseload has grown along with its increased enforcement power from a mere handful of cases in the early years to almost 300 in recent years. It has acquired a paid staff of 16 to perform day-to-day support tasks and is aided regularly by dedicated volunteers and citizen advisors.

In short, the Commission has fully "arrived" in the County after a long struggle to justify and clarify its existence, and it enters the 1980's with a sense of accomplishment and stature that is matched by few county-level human relations agencies in the nation.

The National Scene

The Human Relations Commission was conceived in response to the nationwide civil rights movement of the 1950's. The movement gained impetus from the 1954 Supreme Court ruling that "separate but equal" education was unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education*). But the decision was not followed by dramatic voluntary change.

As postponement and frustration of efforts to implement the law occurred, litigation and appeals to the country's conscience to end racial discrimination were joined by demonstrations, boycotts and sit-ins. Finally, in 1957, the nation passed its first civil rights legislation since reconstruction, protecting voting rights, and by 1964, yet another federal Civil Rights Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations and employment.

Change did not come without cost. That same year, 1964, three civil rights leaders were murdered in Mississippi while helping register blacks to vote. Marches in Selma, Alabama, and riots in New York, Chicago and other cities followed. By 1965 American cities were literally burning over civil rights issues.

Here in Montgomery County, Maryland, our Human Relations Commission witnessed, shared in, and reacted to many of these events. It grew, not without setbacks, as the movement grew.

The Beginnings 1960-1962

The immediate pressure that led Montgomery County leaders to decide that an interracial commission might be needed here were local boycotts and demonstrations in 1960.

In January of that year the NAACP's Montgomery County Chapter, inspired by the success of civil rights demonstrations elsewhere, began an economic boycott against two Rockville restaurants which refused to serve blacks. The boycott was accompanied by a formal request by concerned citizens before the County Council that a "Council of Human Rights" be formed to exercise "persuasive" action in cases of discrimination.

Council Creates Commission

While the Council was considering the request, picketing began in July at Glen Echo Park, a privately owned amusement center in Bethesda, to protest its policy of racial segregation. This provoked the Council to establish an interracial council on July 12, 1960.

The County Council gave the new "Commission on Interracial Problems" the cautious mandate of communication with trade

associations, individual owners and operators of recreation, restaurant and hotel facilities and any individuals "who propose or oppose the integration of such facilities." Further, it was asked to "attempt to arrive at methods whereby the good name of Montgomery County and its public peace may be continued." Put simply, the Commission was created to help ease tension.

The original Commission members, appointed by the Council, were drawn from a cross-section of community organizations: The Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, the Chamber of Commerce, the Montgomery County Ministerial Association, the Washington Board of Rabbis, the Urban League and the Democratic State Central Committee. The Republican State Central Committee declined to participate. The members served, at least ostensibly, as individuals, not as representatives of organizations.

The Commission first met on July 27, 1960, electing as Chairwoman Ann Brown of the Democratic Central Committee.

The First Issue-Glen Echo

The first order of business was Glen Echo Park. The problem at the park was recalcitrant segregation of all the facilities. The Commission, however, narrowed its attention to the fact that public funds were being used to transport white children participating in the County's summer recreation program to the segregated pool at the park.

This, the County Attorney stated, was illegal. The Commission recommended that the program cease and a non-segregated one replace it. By resolution of September 7, 1960, the County Council unanimously agreed.

The Council's vote only resolved one sideline issue, and resentment of Glen Echo's continuing segregation mounted. Public airing of such resentment brought results.

In April 1961, Glen Echo announced a change of policy and opened all of its facilities to all persons. (Over the next several years, however, the park experienced further problems, including an Easter riot in 1967. It finally closed its doors as a private park in 1968 and was turned over to the federal government.)

Participation in the Glen Echo desegregation effort was a good beginning for the Commission. Although credit properly belonged to the community activists who had picketed the park, the Commission's involvement showed that it could pursue a legitimate investigatory function in the County and could help in achieving peaceful social change.

In the fall of 1960, the Commission sought and received from the County Council authority to make surveys, studies and

recommendations concerning interracial and human relations conditions and problems. The Commission then launched a study of County Government hiring practices. This led to reaffirmations by County officials that they would not tolerate discrimination, and the County code was amended to reflect this attitude.

The Commission also surveyed racial discrimination in places of public accommodations. The results, published in the Commission's first annual report, revealed that the majority of establishments serving the public were willing to state for the record that they did not discriminate. Of the 228 owners interviewed, 140 stated that they served all persons without question, and 118 of these added that they would employ any qualified person, regardless of race.

Blacks Excluded

Nevertheless, frequent complaints of discrimination in public accommodations came before the Commission. Many of these involved episodes in which mixed racial groups arrived at restaurants, only to have blacks rejected at the door. One particularly unfortunate but typical incident involved a black child who could not enter a roller skating rink with his white classmates.

Even after Commission investigations of such incidents, few owners voluntarily changed their policies. Owners apparently feared the economic consequences of being out on a limb alone on a social issue.

Legal Force vs. Friendly Persuasion

This attitude in the community convinced the Commission that passage of legal restraints would be necessary for real civil rights progress. Without legal compulsion, the Commission felt "the right to equal treatment will develop slowly, if at all."

Thus, within its first year of existence, the Commission proposed passage of a public accommodations law. The proposal itself evolved from bitter contention. Two dissenting Commissioners resigned citing their opposition to "coercive legislation" and their belief that a "policy of moderation" and a "purely voluntary trend toward integration" were working in the County.

Discrimination Banned in Public Places

On January 16, 1962, the Council voted four-to-two to outlaw racial and religious discrimination in places of public accommodations. Montgomery County was the first Maryland county to prohibit discrimination in public places. The County was two years ahead of even the federal government in enacting an equal public accommodations law.

Under the new law the Commission was authorized to investigate possible violations, and if it found any, to conciliate or turn them over to prosecuting attorneys. Penalties included up to six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

To achieve passage Council members had reached a compromise allowing an exemption for establishments selling alcoholic beverages as a "prominent part" of their business. The exemption remained in effect for five years.

From the start, enforcement met with mixed success. The "tavern exemption" proved crucial, forcing the Commission to drop several prominent cases. A number of well publicized complaints were filed against Crivella's Wayside Restaurant in Silver Spring, but the restaurant qualified

as exempt from the anti-discrimination law because its beer-wine ratio exceeded that for food.

In another notable instance, County resident and then Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver filed a complaint against the Country Corner Inn in Olney for its refusal to serve several black Peace Corps trainees. Again, the tavern exemption allowed discrimination to continue.

Even so, the legislation was having an undeniable progressive effect. Cases to which the tavern exemption did not apply were frequently resolved successfully by the Commission with commitments by restaurants not to discriminate in the future.

A bowling alley and a motel both dropped their discrimination policies as a result of complaints filed with the Commission. However, a public swimming pool evaded the law by changing to private club status.

Commission Renamed

The same 1962 ordinance that put the Public Accommodations Law into effect also reorganized the Commission, renaming it the Commission on Human Relations and giving it self-perpetuating status.

The agency's name remains the same today in the County Code (Chapter 27), although even officially it has since been shortened to the Human Relations Commission (HRC).

Years of Struggle 1962-65

Public accommodations enforcement carried over as an issue in the 1962 election campaign. A more conservative County Council was elected, and the Commission, which had been created by a friendly council, came into conflict with it.

As 1963 began, a new County Councilman, John Hiser, who had run for his seat on an anti-public accommodations ordinance platform, proposed the law's repeal. Meanwhile, the Commission itself was proposing that the law be strengthened by removing the tavern exemption. This direct confrontation was played out in the next several months before a County Council that now had a 5-2 Republican majority.

On April 24, 1963, a Council hearing on repeal of the Public Accommodations Law was held. It received national media coverage. A broad range of local and national groups had spoken out against repeal as the hearing date approached, arguing that repeal would be psychologically devastating to blacks. At the hearing itself, an agenda of over 100 speakers caused a continuation two nights later. On the first night about 1,200 people attended, a record for such a meeting. Speaking for the Commission, Reverend Kenneth Wentzel argued that repeal of the law would abolish the Commission, which is needed as a "forum for... peaceable conversation and dialogue" on interracial problems.

Debate on the proposal continued throughout the summer. In its 1963 annual report the Commission bluntly deplored the divisions in the County Council by urging it to "accept the responsibility for an orderly and lawful transition... to acceptance of the Negro as a full citizen "or else pay the consequences in possible violence." Specifically, the Commission demanded the removal of the "odious exemption clause" for taverns. Finally, on September 12, the Council voted (four-to-two) to reject Hiser's proposal to repeal the public accommoda-

Human Relations Chairpersons 1960-1980

Ann Brown	1960-1962
Rev. Kenneth B. Wentzel	1962-1963 and 1964-1965
Dr. John J. O'Connor	1963-1964
Georgia R. Lawson	1965-1967
Frank E. Wall	1967-1968
Bebe Petrou	1968
Gerald D. Morgan	1968-1971
Paul L. Hershey	1971-1974
Joan R. Thompson	1974-1979
James J. Mihalik	1979-present

tions ordinance and the Commission's mandate.

March on Washington

In August 1963 Montgomery County and the entire country awaited the March on Washington by civil rights advocates, led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. At an August 8 County Council meeting it was proposed that all public meetings require permits, an attempt to control spillover from the Washington crowds. The proposal was attacked as an illegal intrusion on elementary human rights and did not succeed.

When August 28 arrived, hundreds of thousands of people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial and heard Dr. King announce, "I have a dream."

Problems in Housing

Though relatively impotent as a body of divided opinion acting without staff help or funding at the behest of a less than enthusiastic Council, the Commission continued to confront issues that were troubling the entire nation.

In fiscal years 1963 and 1964 the black community increasingly spoke out at Commission meetings on problems in housing. In February 1964, NAACP spokeswoman Edith Throckmorton reported that County slum landlords were charging high rents for rundown buildings and unfairly evicting blacks because of rezoning. In April at the Commission's housing seminar (which had become an annual event) Leonard Jackson, president of the Ken-Gar Civic Association, spoke on the practical limitations of black self-improvement efforts in housing: they had no money to remodel, and could get no loans. Low-cost housing developments, he added, were the County's need. (Jackson later served as an HRC Commissioner.)

Fair housing was the topic at another Commission meeting on June 22, 1964. Atlee Shidler testified as president of Suburban Maryland Fair Housing, a community group organized to promote equal housing opportunities for blacks. Shidler claimed that black communities were being squeezed out of the County, and he urged that powers of government be used to counteract the trend. Shidler summed up the situation in the County as follows:

"The arrival of Negro families has not affected the curve of increasing property values... (but) many homeowners fear and expect Negro inundation as much as they fear and expect loss of property values."

Prejudicial Justice

Fair housing and equal public accommodations were not the only issues before the Commission in its early years. Scattered incidents of interracial violence were another concern.

In September 1963, Edith Throckmorton brought two such cases before the Commission. One involved the alleged throwing of objects and use of objectionable language by the white occupant of a car driving through a black community. The other involved the attack on a black man by two whites, who were later charged with assault and battery.

But the most prominent County interracial incident of the early 1960's was the Giles-Johnson case. It began in the summer of 1961 as a controversial accusation by a teenage white girl against three black youths. Following the trial, which brought a guilty verdict and death sentence for all three, there followed six years of legal argument and public concern over questionable evidence in the case. A crusade for retrial was led by *Sentinel* editor Roger

Farquhar, and it at last succeeded when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of reopening the case. This led to freedom for all three men.

The Giles-Johnson case spotlighted the issue of prejudicial legal proceedings, which blacks felt invariably worked against them. In response to complaints of this nature, the Commission announced in March 1964, plans to investigate the system of jury selection in the County. This was worrisome to the County Council, which expressed concern that the Commission might be stepping outside its intended scope of activities.

Commission Stifled

The Commission and the County Council remained at odds throughout 1964. Commission appointments were long delayed. The Council hinted that restaurant and real estate interests should be represented among HRC members. The Commission viewed this as a threat to its usefulness.

Finally, in August, three appointments were made. But the Commission publicly protested those appointments in its annual report of September 1964, claiming that Commissioners who opposed any form of social change had been named.

In April 1965, the Council went further and appointed two more new Commissioners. Both were personal choices of Councilman Hiser. Civil rights advocates objected to both, and one appointee, the Reverend William B. Adams, was accused by opponents of being an outright racist.

The *Montgomery County Sentinel* also deplored the appointments. Recalling Hiser's segregationist history, the newspaper stated on April 8, 1965 that the Council "gave Hiser carte blanche to destroy the Commission," a "real tragedy" because the public accommodations law had saved the County from violence.

Amid the outcry, pickets from the Congress of Racial Equality appeared at the April 26 meeting of the Commission. Police came also, on guard. A month later another tense meeting occurred. CORE demonstrated outside while members of the White Citizens Council of Maryland sat in the audience.

A Period of Decline

Embroided in constant controversy and internal stalemate, the Commission entered a period of decline from 1964 into 1966. Little was accomplished. Even its standing committees were gradually abolished. For example, one Commissioner's "housing report" presented in April 1965, suggested meekly that the Commission limit itself to non-controversial matters. Another Commissioner pointed out, however, that no housing committee existed which could legitimately draft such a report.

The situation was so bad that the County Council President suggested in July 1965, that the Commission be abolished and a new one be appointed by groups other than the Council, thereby avoiding politicization. She also wanted the Commission's hearing process, one of its major activities, bypassed to avoid divisive discussion by taking cases directly into court.

Open Hearings Opposed

The Commission itself was split on the hearing issue. Elizabeth Scull, then a Commissioner and now a longtime County Council member, took the view that bypassing would weaken the Commission: "The hearing process is a must for getting all the facts on the table." The opposing view was that the hearing process was often

worthless.

Civil rights groups bitterly opposed eliminating hearings. Their view carried the day, and the move to abolish hearings failed. Nor was the Commission abolished and reconstituted. Ironically, even Councilman Hiser opposed that move. "Let them stew in their own juice," he said.

Meanwhile, public confidence in the Commission had dwindled to the point that only three public accommodations complaints were received in 1965. Some County citizens were bypassing the Commission to file discrimination complaints with the state agency, the Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations. Activists were comparing the County Commission unfavorably to the Rockville Human Relations Commission.

As 1965 ended, one Commissioner said in frustration: "I'm glad my term is almost over. It's been like serving a jail sentence, much of it in solitary confinement."

Years of Activism 1965-1971

Despite its continuing stalemate, the Commission revived somewhat by late 1965. It appointed a subcommittee on open housing. It recommended County Council action to protect the housing interests of low income blacks, particularly by shielding black communities such as Scotland in Potomac from exploitation by developers.

Meanwhile movements on several fronts were compelling the Commission to take a stand on fair housing. The Commission was becoming involved, timidly at first, in an inexorable movement toward what would eventually become a County ordinance enforcing fair housing.

As a first step the Commission, pushed by a minority of its members and by Suburban Maryland Fair Housing, reached a compromise in 1965 recommending that persons seeking housing "be thought of without regard to race."

By 1966, the Rockville Human Relations Commission was drafting fair housing legislation and a federal law was under consideration. In April the makeup of the Commission changed with the appointment of three new members, bringing a shift in position away from the middle of the road.

All White Apartments Picketed

An all white apartment complex in Silver Spring was picketed by 75 open housing advocates in March of 1966. This and other open housing demonstrations in the County prompted the Commission, along with other community organizations, to hold five nights of public hearings on open housing in June. The hearings were well attended and covered by the media. Marchers demonstrated peacefully outside. Realtors, who had launched a mail and newspaper campaign against open housing legislation, were conspicuously absent.

On June 25, the Commission appointed a committee of 12 citizens to draft two open housing ordinances, one covering apartment rentals, and the other covering the real estate industry.

Recognizing that "passage of law doesn't change hearts," in a further step the Commission also embarked on a new program of education to create a "continuing dialogue" on housing discrimination.

Political Victory for Housing

Open housing was a major issue in the 1966 County and State elections. Maryland

gubernatorial candidate George P. Mahoney (Democrat) opposed fair housing legislation and ran with the campaign slogan, "A man's home is his castle." He was defeated by Spiro Agnew.

Local County Council election results were a positive sign for the Commission and for fair housing. After four years of what *The Washington Post* (March 21, 1967) had described as virtual "dormancy" in which the County had erased its reputation as a pacesetter in human relations, the Commission came back to life quickly in 1967 under a new County Council. As one Commissioner said: "Now we have a Council in line with our thinking."

HRC Proposes Housing Law

On January 30 the Commission voted six to three to submit draft fair housing legislation to the Council. During Commission debate, the aforementioned Commissioner Adams spoke against the legislation in language that offended many and became a public issue. In one of his milder statements he said: "The forced housing, alias fair housing, alias slum housing ordinance... is a crass demonstration of compulsory racism on behalf of a minority group."

On February 7 Adams was fired by the County Council, but a judge restored him to the Commission in March, ruling that his right to free speech had been denied.

In April of 1967 the County Council voted to make the Commission a full time agency of the County Government, and then turned over to it the task of moderating a stalemate between the management of Suburban Hospital in Bethesda and its housekeeping employees. The strike, which had racial overtones, dragged on for months before being resolved.

A Housing Milestone

A milestone in the history of the Commission was achieved on July 20, 1967. After five summer nights of public hearings and demonstrations by supporters, the Commission's proposed open housing law was passed by the County Council.

It was one of the broadest laws in the nation, outlawing discrimination in the sale or rental of virtually all housing except owner-occupied housing of two rented units or less. It preceded by one year the federal Fair Housing Law. The state of Maryland also passed a fair housing law in 1967, but it was thrown out the next year in a public referendum.

To assemble the votes needed for passage of the County law, the Council included a "presumptive clause" that shifted the burden of proof of compliance from the landlord or owner if ten percent of the units in an apartment or neighborhood were occupied by non-whites.

In the same year that Montgomery County passed its open housing law, civil rights riots broke out elsewhere in 34 American cities. Violence erupted close to home after Rap Brown spoke in Cambridge Maryland.

Tavern Exemption Repealed

Within days after enacting the open housing ordinance, the County Council voted unanimously to repeal the "tavern exemption" to the Public Accommodations Law.

The amendments also broadened the Commission's powers and prescribed uniform administrative procedures consistent with the Fair Housing Law. Three-member housing and public accommodations panel:

were created to enforce both laws.

The Commission was enlarged to 15 members and was given stronger advisory, coordination and program implementation roles in interracial and interagency affairs. For the Commission, this was a sign of respect by its political parent, the County Council.

First Full-Time Staff

A few months earlier in March 1967, the Council had approved the Commission's first substantial budget request (\$25,000), providing for its first full-time Executive Secretary and a typist. Two earlier part-time Executive Secretaries, S.W. Parrish and Robert Passmore, had permanent assignments in the County Manager's office.

In August, Bertram Keys, Jr., a former Community Relations Director for the D.C. Legal Aide Society, was appointed Executive Secretary.

A Temporary Setback

The open housing ordinance was ruled invalid by the Circuit Court in December 1967. In March of 1968 the Maryland Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's ruling that enactment procedures were impermissible.

Undaunted, civil rights proponents in the County cooperated in a swift effort to draft and get passed a new fair housing law, this one without a presumptive clause. The Human Relations Commission's Housing Committee coordinated this project.

By May 1968 the County Council had passed the new ordinance. Termed by federal authorities "the most comprehensive fair housing measure in the United States," it was stronger even than the recently enacted federal housing legislation. The ordinance was further supported by a June 13 Supreme Court ruling against housing discrimination.

Poor People's March

Early in 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King, in Memphis, Tennessee, to organize the Poor People's Campaign, was assassinated. The riots which followed destroyed entire neighborhoods in the District of Columbia, and although Montgomery County experienced no comparable violence, there were seven fire bomb attacks in Rockville, one upon the city hall.

During this nationwide catharsis the Commission issued a statement to the community supporting the conclusions of the federal Kerner Commission report concerning the responsibility of white citizens for creating and maintaining black ghettos. The statement called for a survey of job opportunities in the County as a means of measuring the degree of minority frustration.

When the Poor People's Campaign finally arrived in Washington, D.C., in May 1968, the Commission issued a statement of sympathy with the purpose of the campaign and urged courteous treatment of participants who might visit the County. Many campaigners were hosted by Montgomery County religious and civic groups. The Commission set up a telephone service to relate information and dispel rumors that accompanied the summer encampment in the capital.

The Commission's support for the Poor People's Campaign was controversial. There was widespread concern that violence could erupt. Some County Council members openly disapproved of the Commission's actions.

Other issues before the Commission at

the time included gun control, employment opportunities in the County for inner-city blacks and public accommodations complaints.

Armed with enforcement authority and staff capability, the Commission investigated discrimination complaints against barbershops, swimming pools and country clubs.

Swimming Pools Desegregate

Repeated incidents of discrimination at community swimming pools raised the question of whether such pools were indeed "public" facilities. In October of 1968 one non-profit community pool in Bethesda-Chevy Chase was integrated after the Commission successfully utilized the complaint process authorized by the public accommodations ordinance. This was the first neighborhood pool in the County to integrate.

Two years later, in the summer of 1970, the Commission collected letters of voluntary non-discrimination policy from community pools, despite a federal judge's ruling that one of these was private and could set its own policy.

Country Club Complaints

Several complaints were filed against country clubs. Though the Commission had no authority over private membership clubs, their discriminatory guest policies became the public accommodations issue. Complaints were lodged against Chevy Chase, Argyle, Kenwood, Lakewood and Manor Country Clubs.

One publicized incident involved alleged discrimination against Mrs. Carl Rowen in her attempt to participate in a tennis league. The Commission, supported by tennis star Arthur Ashe, urged the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association to take a stand against segregation.

A planned speaking engagement by District of Columbia Mayor Walter Washington at Kenwood Country Club was cancelled in January 1969 for racial reasons. The incident so embarrassed some of Kenwood's members that they themselves initiated a move to integrate the club.

Conceding that the Commission had little legal sway over country clubs, HRC Executive Secretary Keys said the Commission's goal was "to open up completely these country clubs to Negroes," by working with their leadership and through publicity.

A few of the country club complaints were conciliated, but most wound up in lengthy court battles. One noteworthy country club case went to a public hearing in 1976. After hearing the complaint of James Gregg against Montgomery Country Club, the Panel first decided that the club was actually a place of public accommodation due to its management and membership selection methods, and then ordered the club to accept Mr. Gregg and his family as members free of charge for five years. The Panel's decision was appealed to the Circuit Court. (Three years later, in 1979, both parties agreed to an out of court settlement.)

Because of its questionable legal authority with country clubs, the Commission explored other ways to attack their discriminatory policies, either through their dependence on state beverage laws or because they receive real estate tax breaks for their "green space." Ultimately a state law was passed banning discrimination by those who receive preferential real estate tax rates.

A Blow Over Barbershops

The Commission also responded to complaints against barbershops. In Gaithersburg, for example, black employees of the National Bureau of Standards were having difficulty getting haircuts at two shops. After the Public Accommodations Panel's hearing on the complaints, a barbershop owner filed suit against two complainants, two witnesses and Bertram Keys. The Commission filed a counter suit.

By the time the court ruled on the barber case in 1969, most County barbers were serving blacks. But the court dealt a major blow to the Commission by invalidating the County's 1962 Public Accommodations Law. Coincidentally this brought the existence of the Commission itself into question, since the 1962 Public Accommodations Law had reconstituted it.

Police-Community Relations

By the late 1960's police-community relations had become the most explosive human relations issue in the County. Blacks had long complained of unfair treatment by the white police force. The first black police officer was not hired until 1968.

Attempting to deal with sensitive police-community relations issues, the Commission helped establish a part-time community relations department within the Police Department. The Commission's Executive Secretary participated in the police recruit training program. Additional black officers began to be hired.

In the spring of 1969 newspaper headlines reported the obscenity trial of Bunton Dillingham of Freedom House, a counter-culture residence in Bethesda. In the midst of his trial, the police and Freedom House engaged in a confrontation and a seven-day stand-off. On June 11 Dillingham was convicted. Later that month Freedom House was closed.

The confrontation provoked the Commission to announce plans to study police-community relations. This angered the County Council, which felt it was properly handling the problem in closed sessions and that the Commission was overstepping.

The Commission promptly reaffirmed that it would proceed with the study with or without the Council's approval. One Commissioner warned: "If we are gagged on this issue, what will be the next issue we will be instructed not to explore? Prejudice? Open housing?"

County Council member James Gleason responded that perhaps the ordinance creating the Commission needed rewriting if "you are going to get into some areas."

Public Accommodations Law Reenacted

Because the court had thrown out the Public Accommodations Law in the barber-shop case, the County Council now faced the job of reenacting legislation and, at the same time, reconfirming the legal existence of the Commission on Human Relations.

The Council passed in November of 1969 a new and equally strong law banning discrimination in public accommodations based on race, religion and also national origin.

Despite hints to the contrary, the Council did reestablish the Commission to deal with discrimination. However, its powers were cut, so that the Commission could deal with matters of group tension only with the Council's approval.

Police Relations Worsen

The Council's restriction did not deter the Commission's Justice Committee from its already approved study of police-community relations.

Meanwhile, housing problems provoked altercations with police at Good Hope, Quebec Terrace and Berlin (Rockville Gardens) Apartments in July 1970. These were discussed at open Commission sessions. They led to a formal Human Relations Commission recommendation that equal protection and equal enforcement of the law be ensured and that police minority recruitment and human relations training efforts be improved.

The "Clipper" case of alleged police brutality became a center of Commission controversy in March 1970. The victim, named Clipper, claimed his arm had been broken by police when they arrested him. Because his complaint was filed after the statute of limitations ran out, the Commission was never able to prove whether or not the allegation was correct.

Release of the long awaited police-community relations report was delayed till after the 1970 elections to avoid its becoming embroiled in politics. The Commission was already under attack for its handling of the Clipper case. County Council member James Gleason, who would soon be elected County Executive, charged that the Commission was dominated by radicals and was overstepping its legal authority. His proposed amendment limiting Commission activity to the spheres of race, creed and color was passed. Gleason felt that the Commission was entirely too antagonistic in its stance and oriented toward making fiery headlines, especially regarding police problems.

After the election the Commission finally released its police-community relations report, which, not surprisingly, described widespread belief among blacks that the County police practiced discrimination.

Years of Professionalism 1971-1976

As 1971 began, Montgomery County's first chief executive under its new charter took office and a new era arrived for the Human Relations Commission. There was no abrupt shift from the activism of the late 60's. However, a difference in style was noticeable in tune with County Executive James Gleason's desire to avoid the appearance of cultivating controversy. Gleason preferred to counter discrimination through quiet maneuvering and by fostering conciliation.

The Commission performed in an even more businesslike and impartial manner. Its staff was enlarged to process an overwhelming increase in complaints. A flurry of laws, amendments and regulations were passed in the early 1970's in the interest of broadening and disciplining the County's human relations efforts.

The author Dave Brack is a Wheaton resident who is Supervisory Writer-Editor for the U.S. General Accounting Office. Working in his spare time as a volunteer, he researched the Human Relations Commission's history by reviewing Commission reports and minutes and accounts in the Montgomery County Sentinel and other newspapers and by interviewing early Commissioners, civil rights leaders and County Council members.

Another volunteer, Edie Tatel who is a former English teacher of Chevy Chase, edited the history, assisted by Helga Butler, also of Chevy Chase.